Bringing Up ASD Concerns

How to Set-Up the Conversation

Discussing concerns you have about autism with families is important. You can support families in recognizing the signs by using the following process.

• **First, point out signs of autism using “I wonder” statements.** “I wonder why he stays focused on his cars and doesn’t notice that you’re building a garage.”

• **Make connections between the signs and the child’s learning.** “I wonder if focusing only on his cars makes it hard for him to learn new play ideas from you.”

• **Wait for the caregiver to ask why.** This is a sign that the caregiver may be ready to hear your opinion and advice.

• **Connect the sign to the word “autism.”** “Focusing on objects more than people is one potential sign of autism.”

• **Acknowledge the caregiver’s opinions and beliefs.** “You’re right, he does love cars! He’s doing a great job of making the driving noise as he plays with them. And we’ve both noticed that he has a hard time paying attention to other people while he plays with them.”

• **Allow yourself to be vulnerable.** “I might be wrong, but I want to make sure we aren’t missing anything that could prevent his progress.”

• **Continue the conversation.** Conducting a screener, such as the Screening Tool for Autism in Toddlers and Young Children (STAT), can help you discuss additional signs and prepare the parent for a later evaluation.

Guiding Principles

• **Be honest and direct.** Use the word “autism” and give specific examples of what you’re seeing.

• **Give wait time.** Allow the caregiver to process each statement

• **Seek input.** Ask how what you’re seeing compares to the child in their daily life

• **Practice active listening.** Seek understanding by asking open-ended questions. Your job is to be honest about your concerns, not to convince the caregiver.

• **Be compassionate.** Respond to the caregiver’s feelings by reflecting rather than trying to fix. Make comments such as “I can imagine…” rather than, “Everything will be ok.”

• **Use help-giving strategies.** Highlight the caregiver’s strengths and help them identify their own concerns and needs